



# CONGRESSMAN HENRY A. WAXMAN NEWS

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CAPITOL SPOTLIGHT  
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## CANCER WAR NOT GOING WELL

As Chairman of the House Subcommittee on Health and the Environment, I review each year major reports on cancer research in the United States and the long-term plans of the principal cancer research centers.

There is definitely some good news. Perhaps most encouraging is the marked increase in life expectancy of children stricken with leukemia and related forms of cancer. Specific types of cancer which only 20 years ago killed their young victims within a year or two, can now be fought off for extended periods of time. Sometimes doctors succeed in inducing a period of indefinite remission.

The overall cancer statistics are only mildly encouraging. The actual incidence of cancer is slowly increasing. However, this fact must not be misinterpreted. It does not reflect a decline in our ability to treat or cure cancer. Rather, it reflects increased longevity, advances in cardiovascular medicine, advances in the treatment of respiratory infections, and other steps forward which have resulted in more people living long enough to eventually contract cancer.

Unfortunately, some of the cancers where advances have been greatest, such as Hodgkin's Disease, are quite rare. Whereas, some of the most common forms of cancer, such as lung cancer, have proven to be most resistant to research breakthroughs. Lung cancer, the most widespread form of cancer among males, shows a survival rate holding steady over the last few decades at barely 10 percent.

(One point of "progress" I note with sadness and regret is that along with the increased popularity of smoking among females, there has been a commensurate rise in lung cancer. Contrary to the Virginia Slim message, the "baby" who has come a long way, is moving in the wrong direction!)

What can we Americans do to fight more effectively against this most dreaded disease?

Many cancer experts believe that we should be spending more money and energy on prevention and early detection of cancer rather than concentrating so heavily on the treatment of intermediate or even advanced

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cases of the disease.

After all, cigarette smoking is a prominent factor in the majority of lung cancer cases. Though we cannot yet treat lung cancer with much success, we should be doing a better job in helping people stop smoking and helping young people avoid starting this potentially lethal habit.

More research can and should be done on the complex relationship between diet and cancer. From an epidemiological standpoint, we have good reason to believe that the enormous variations in cancer rates from one country to another reflect, at least in part, widely varied eating habits.

Finally, at the risk of being called a big spender, I must assert that not enough money is being spent on cancer research.

The single most important center of cancer research activities is the National Cancer Institute. Just four years ago, the Institute could afford to finance about half the research projects its panel of experts judged as deserving. Yet this year, according to science research expert Daniel S. Greenberg, only about one-fourth of the worthwhile proposals will be funded.

We are not talking about turning down crackpots or second rate scientists. Their applications are screened out very early in the process. The sad fact is that three quarters of the applications received by NCI from established researchers, superbly trained and working in advanced research settings, are turned down solely because of lack of funds.

If we were to divert but a minuscule portion from the mindless arms race to cancer research, I believe the results would be phenomenal. Ours is a scientific and technological society. Surely, this should result in more than nuclear missiles, home computers, and video games.

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